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Fostering Tajik Hydraulic Development: Examining the Role of Soft Power in the Case of the Rogun Dam

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ABSTRACT: Basin riparians are not equally endowed in their resources and capacity to control water within a shared international river basin. Beyond hydrological constraints and geographical positions, other less tangible factors such as discourses and narratives influence interactions among basin riparians for water resources control and river basin development, requiring further analytical refinement of the role of power. The analysis of discursive and ideological dimensions of power, or 'soft' power, in particular, enables insights to strategies and tactics of water control under conditions of power asymmetries between basin states. This paper examines the debate around the controversial large-scale Rogun Dam project on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan, exploring how the exercise of 'soft' power can, and sometimes cannot, shape transboundary water outcomes over water allocation. By focusing on international diplomacy and narratives, the paper provides insights into the non-coercive ways in which hydraulic development is justified. In particular, it is shown how 'soft' power was utilised by the Tajik decision-makers to legitimise dam development both at the international and domestic levels. The paper illustrates how, in the case of the Rogun Dam, 'soft' power falls short of determining a hydraulic development that changes the status quo of water allocation for Tajikistan.

KEYWORDS: Transboundary water relations, power, dams, Central Asia, Aral Sea Basin

INTRODUCTION

The shrinking Aral Sea is one of the most iconic environmental issues facing the Central Asian states. Regional cooperative efforts have been initiated to address the issue of over-abstraction from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers that feed into the Aral Sea, and to curb further environmental degradation. The establishment of high-profile organisations such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (ICWC) underscores the importance of water issues for the Central Asian states. The collapse of the Soviet Union left the Central Asian republics, notably Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, with a poorly maintained, large-scale water distribution and irrigation system to be managed (O'Hara, 2000). At the same time, there are new river basin development projects in the region that have created tensions among the riparian states of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. Notable is the debate around the Rogun Dam project on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan, part of the Amu Darya River Basin. The plan for this project has provoked harsh criticism from neighbouring Uzbekistan, raising concerns, among other things, of a decreased water flow downstream. Although the basin is shared by Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, this project brings to light strategies to consolidate control over water resources between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The tense and yet non-violent conflict between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan provides insights to the emerging scholarship on the role of power in transforming transboundary water interactions.[1] Following the claim of Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008) that hydropolitical analysis should focus on transboundary water interactions rather than specific events of conflict or cooperation, the aim of this paper is to explore how the exercise of 'soft' power is used to shape transboundary water outcomes over water allocation with varying outcomes in changing existing water allocation and patterns of water use. In this paper, 'soft' power is understood as "what appears to be a constant framing and reframing of problems and attempts to influence actors' perceptions of the problem, of the situation, and of each other" in transboundary water interactions (Zeitoun et al., 2011: 161). Specifically, the paper illustrates how 'soft' power operates in transboundary water interactions in the process of advancing the development of the Rogun Dam by Tajikistan and sheds light on the limitations of discursive strategies to change a disadvantageous status quo over water use. The paper explores the way dam development is framed by actors in Tajikistan to seek compliance by other basin states to river basin development. The way in which environmental issues are framed reveals differences in how stakeholders form interpretations of what is at stake and what should be done (Dewulf et al., 2005). Importantly, this paper analyses the non-violent, non-coercive forms of power that are at play in transboundary water interactions, adding original insights to the arguments by Zeitoun et al. (2011) on the effectiveness of 'soft' power. At the same time, the paper furthers the argument on soft power by examining how a regional discourse on the benefits of dam development encounters a bottleneck when it comes to securing financial resources, demonstrating the Tajik government's limitations in combining 'hard' and 'soft' power to pursue a strategy of hydraulic development, something that Joseph Samuel Nye (2009) defined as 'smart power'.

Several studies have been conducted on overt forms of power in violent environmental conflicts (among others Homer-Dixon, 1999; Le Billon, 2001; Gleditsch et al., 2006; Brochmann and Gleditsch, 2012). However, there has been little discussion about the use of discursive, ideational forms of power in international river basins. The paper presents an analysis of the ways in which the Tajik government has developed a regional discourse on the benefits of the Rogun Dam, one that attempts to justify and legitimise its construction and hydraulic development plans more generally. Power analysis highlights the deeply nuanced political rhetoric surrounding the dam, and enables a critical approach to the initiatives carried out by the Tajik government during the last decade.

The next section outlines the notion of power and the analytical framework that informs this study, while the third section outlines the main characteristics of the Rogun Dam and the ways in which it could change the Central Asian political and environmental setting. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections define the main traits of the Tajik discourse and categorise the discursive mechanisms deployed to facilitate the construction of the Rogun Dam. The seventh section assesses the two contrasting views on the Rogun Dam and the extent to which compliance to a new river basin development ideal is achieved through discourse and ideological mechanisms, while the final section concludes suggesting areas for future research.

POWER ANALYSIS OF WATER CONTROL

Power is central to politics and shapes the structures of political agency. The use of power in the context of transboundary natural resources management influences the way countries decide to

[1] The Rogun Dam is not the only large hydroelectric project planned in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan. The upstream country in the Syr Darya Basin, is also trying to build the Kambarata I Dam, a project that has received intermittent support from Russia during the last decade and whose fate remains uncertain. While the Kambarata I Dam raised criticism from Uzbekistan, the Rogun Dam has been so far the most effective in crystallising regional tensions over shared waters, also because of the long-standing rivalry between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

develop their natural resources, position their foreign policy, and establish diplomatic and economic ties, in their abstraction, utilisation and trade. Scholars of environmental politics and political geography have explored the link between political power and the politics of resources allocation (see, among others, Taylor, 1985; Lindemann, 2008; Agnew, 2003; Allen, 2003; Büscher, 2014), recognising that power can be evident and hidden, overt and covert. In contrast to the conventional Weberian view of power as coercion, the notion of covert power provides a different perspective, explaining the disparity of political negotiation outcomes in apparently similar geographical configurations of states.

In the context of transboundary river basins, it is recognised that geographical location to the shared water resources becomes less of a determining factor than the use of power (Mirumachi, 2015). Critical hydropolitics, a notion advanced by Sneddon and Fox (2006), points out that conflict and cooperation over shared waters are played out through discursive framings of the environment and social construction of goals of river basin development and cooperative arrangements for such. Harris and Alatout (2010) showed the ways in which discourses define problems and identify solutions that justify particular spatial scales over others, by attaching river development projects to nation and state building. Discourses can thus frame river basin development such that various aspects of water resources management get naturalised. Molle (2008: 132) made an incisive point when he wrote that "Influential concepts in policy making are not merely neutral or scientific; they do not emerge by chance but, rather, are the emanation of complex webs of interests, ideologies, and power". The ways in which such interests, ideologies and power interact are often through non-coercive mechanisms (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006; Zeitoun et al., 2011).

As the scholarship of geopolitics highlights, the role of discourse as a form of power is particularly effective (see Dalby, 1991; Tuathail and Agnew, 1992; Muller, 2008). It is argued that discourse can be more effective than the hard power to coerce: "the conception of power as essentially grounded in coercion represents a minority view" (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009: 3). Here, the Gramscian concept of hegemony and the crucial role played by persuasion and ideology in attaining consent (Gramsci, 1975) is instructive. The assumption is that there is power asymmetry between actors constructing a particular social order. The use and role of power become notable in actors' interactions with others. Moreover, discursive power can produce compliance and consensus, and as Allan (2001: 183) argued, discourses reflect a 'network of consensus' with the effect of normalising certain ideas, norms and management practices. Sanctioned discourse demonstrates the influence of elite decision-makers and actors, "represent[ing] what may be said, who may say it and how it may be interpreted, thereby leading to the creation of a dominant belief system or paradigm" (Turton and Henwood, 2002: 39). As the scholarship on hydro-hegemony (e.g. Zeitoun and Warner, 2006; Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Zeitoun and Allan, 2008; Warner, 2008) demonstrates, in situations where there is de facto power asymmetry between basin states, there are a range of discursive and ideational strategies and tactics to maintain control of water resources.

The paper builds on the analytical framework by Zeitoun et al. (2011) on the ways non-coercive forms of power work for both distributive and integrative ends. They argued that a cooperative arrangement may in fact not be in the interests of those party to it but nonetheless complied with as a result of the way 'soft' power is used. It is pointed out that 'soft' power can bring about compliance through resignation of the less powerful state to the arrangements promoted by the hydro-hegemonic state. In these cases, interests of basin states are not uniform and framing is utilised to bargain water allocation (Zeitoun et al., 2011). For example, stressing the lack of alternatives but to take a particular course of action can also help secure water resources control (Molle et al., 2009). Alternatively, issues can be framed in a way that it would seem as if interests do not differ, resulting in a situation where compliance is fully accepted and ultimately the framing unquestioned. The creation of meta-discourses as a vehicle for exercising 'soft' power can emphasise the imperative to achieve national goals and priorities, and have the effect of promoting large-scale river development projects.

Zeitoun et al. (2011) showed that demonstration of leadership, issue linkage, agenda-setting, securitisation, and limiting access to negotiation meetings or postponing them are examples of the ways in which 'soft' power works. These are a mixture of discursive mechanisms and utilisation of diplomatic resources. Agenda-setting frames what issue is 'on topic' and legitimate to be discussed, while securitisation determines measures that are politically imperative, shutting out any other alternatives to be pursued. Setting the terms of negotiation through exclusion or postponement of meetings, and issue-linking reflect how diplomacy is deployed. Zeitoun et al. (2011) however, largely analyse the use of these mechanism by the hydro-hegemon or the basin state with relative power over others, often seeking to maintain the status quo of water allocation that is favourable to it (see also Zeitoun and Warner, 2006). In this paper, we further explore how other basin states that are not hydro-hegemons try to demonstrate leadership in order to achieve hydraulic development. By doing so, the paper qualifies whether the use of 'soft' power can yield outcomes favourable to the non-hydro-hegemonic states.

By paying attention to the multi-scale nature of hydro-hegemony (Warner, 2008), we examine how discursive mechanisms operate both at the international and domestic level to attempt ensuring hydraulic development and securing control of water resources. By doing so, we also shed light on the way discourse of the dam benefits plays a significant role in justifying hydraulic development: the discourse works for distributive ends at the international level, and to build a national identity as a state moving forward with its economic development at the sub-nation al level. The discourses examined are based on those promoted by the elite decision-makers. These discourses have the tendency to dominate over others, as they are enhanced by the top-down decision-making process within domestic politics, in a setting with little civil society engagement. In addition, elite decision-makers have access to international fora to promote their discourse that portrays the dam project as an expression of the right to develop the country's largely unexploited hydroelectric potential – an entitlement that cannot be disputed if there is to be development of both the state and the region.

WATER POLITICS OVER THE ROGUN DAM

The Rogun Dam was originally conceived in the 1960s as a dual-purpose structure for irrigation water management and for hydroelectricity. The original project consisted of a 335 metre high structure, a reservoir with a volume of 13.3 km^3 and six 600 megawatt (MW) turbines, resulting in a total installed capacity of 3600 MW (Schmidt, 2007). The USSR began preparatory work in 1976, and construction subsequently started in 1982. However, the project came to a standstill with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the newly born Tajik government and its President, Emomali Rahmon, repeatedly attempted to restart the project, the task of raising US$ 2.1 billion[2] necessary to complete it proved challenging[3] (EDB, 2008). A venture with the Russian Aluminium Company (RusAl), which agreed in 2004 to invest USD560 million for the construction of the first stage, failed.

In 2006, the German construction company Lahmeyer International carried out a feasibility study of the Rogun Dam, in which it proposed three stages of construction: Stage I, that envisages a dam height of 235m, Stage II (285m) and Stage III (335m) (Schmidt, 2007). The company also recommended Stage II as the ideal one for the dam, a recommendation that, if followed by Tajikistan, would cause fewer controversies downstream due to a less significant impact on the flow of the Amu Darya (Wegerich et al., 2007). However, President Rahmon insists on realising Stage III, which would make the Rogun Dam the tallest dam in the world while also increasing its symbolic significance, an important factor when it comes to raising popular support for its construction (Menga, 2015). And thus, in 2009, the Tajik head

[2] Equivalent to roughly a third of the country's 2011 GDP (The World Bank, n.d.).

[3] The cost of large hydropower dams generally exceeds what is budgeted. For an insightful analysis, refer to Ansar et al. (2014).

of state announced that the construction of the dam was about to restart using resources allocated from the State budget and those collected through an Initial Public Offering (IPO) launched in 2010 (BBC Monitoring, 2009a). This was against a context of two consecutive energy crises during which energy export no longer became reliable from Tajikistan's perspective (Laldjebaev, 2010).

The Rogun Dam brings a new dimension to the Amu Darya Basin's hydro-hegemonic structure. It can be argued that Uzbekistan, given its water allocation, the total population and the irrigated area of the basin states, is the hydro-hegemon (Wegerich, 2008; Menga, 2014) Moreover, Uzbekistan has maintained its advantageous water allocation based upon established policy during the Soviet era, effectively thwarting the hydropower ambitions of upstream countries. Consequently, the practice of water-intensive cotton monoculture has been maintained, enabling the Uzbek political elites to have social, economic and political control based on agricultural revenue (Weinthal, 2006). Such hydro-hegemony is discernible especially in its relation with Tajikistan, which has a considerably smaller population, comparatively inferior military and political might and a less developed economy. Uzbekistan also has another natural resource that it has access to: natural gas. As the sole supplier of natural gas to Tajikistan, the Uzbek government has imposed high purchase prices and uncompromising payment deadlines (Menga, 2014), directly pressuring Tajikistan by stopping gas supplies (Swinkels, 2014) and delaying rail traffic to the country (Shustov, 2012). Uzbekistan has exploited not only its geographical position and engineering capacity, but also leveraged its bargaining power through energy trade in its relationship with Tajikistan.

Under such hydro-hegemonic circumstances, the Rogun project would be the first major dam[4] finalised in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union with a potential to increase the dependence of the downstream countries on Tajikistan for ensured water flow (Libert et al., 2008). At its full height the storage capacity of the Rogun Dam would be such that the concern of Tajikistan's basin development plan controlling not just the Vakhsh River but also the entire Amu Darya is over-stated (Wegerich et al., 2007). Significantly, while the Rogun Dam will indeed bring a change to a status-quo in which the upstream countries in Central Asia have not been able to exploit their hydroelectric potential, its effects on water flows and water allocation could be significant only in the short term, more precisely during the 16 years needed to fill the reservoir (The World Bank, 2014b). After that, hydropower being based on a non-consumptive use of water resources, water will run through the turbines and then become available downstream for agriculture.

The dam project brings new concerns about who controls the Central Asian waters where upstream and downstream contentions already exist. Through the 'Agreement on cooperation in joint management, use and protection of water resources of interstate sources' (commonly known as the Almaty Agreement) in 1992, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan prioritised the preservation of Soviet water allocation, thus continuing to allocate most of the water in favour of downstream irrigation. The confrontation between upstream and downstream states has, consequently, been unresolved, further underscoring the incompatibility between water demands of irrigation and hydropower (Bohr, 2004). Central Asian leaders have often portrayed water as virtually a non-negotiable matter, as a God-given gift with a nationalistic-charged meaning (Allouche, 2005). Regarding the Rogun Dam, both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have shown little disposition to discuss solutions that would be acceptable to both countries, leaving little room for compromise (Jalilova et al., 2013).

Despite a false start when the initial infrastructure constructed under the Soviet Union was damaged by a flash-flood in 1993 (Yerofeyeva, 2002), the Uzbek President perceived the development of

[4] The International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD, n.d.) defines a major dam as a dam with a height of 150 meters or more from the foundation, a reservoir storage capacity of at least 25 Bm^3 and an electrical generation capacity of at least 1000 MW.

hydraulic infrastructures upstream and the revamp of the Rogun Dam as a threat to the well-being of his country, and opposed the reconstruction of the project vehemently. Such is his rejection, that in 2012, when asked what he thought about the construction of large hydraulic infrastructures upstream, the Uzbek head of state Islam Karimov observed that "all of this could deteriorate to the point where not just serious confrontation, but even wars could be the result" (Reuters, 2012). In contrast, it is reported that the additional 3,600 MW generated by the Rogun Dam may allow Tajikistan to become not only energy-secure,[5] but also, to enable a seasonal surplus sale of electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan through the proposed CASA-1000 (Central Asia – South Asia) transmission line during the summer, generating a much needed revenue. The country's total installed capacity of 4,000 MW could almost double (EBRD, 2009) and hydropower dams will become even more crucial to energy security in a country where hydropower already accounts for over 95% of the total electricity capacity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, n.d.).

On the one hand, the Uzbek head of state framed water as a vital resource for irrigation and to sustain its people, and not as a source of energy. Consequently, the objection to the Rogun Dam is based on concerns of reduced downstream water availability during the years necessary to fill the reservoir, potential economic losses for irrigated agriculture and risks of having a dam situated in a seismically active area (Bichsel, 2012). On the other hand, the Tajik discourse counters these claims by portraying water as a key resource for the prosperity of the country, with the Rogun Dam being a nationally symbolic, cooperative regional project (see Suyarkulova, 2014). This discourse leverages aspirations and ideals of the developmental and green paradigms. At the same time, this discourse targets different stakeholders simultaneously: the international community with access to funds to realise the project; and stakeholders within domestic politics. The use of international diplomacy, mobilisation of funds and gain of internal support reflect how the discourse is dual-structured: a narrative on Tajikistan as a responsible water user that should be allowed – and possibly, financially supported – to exercise its right of building a dam for the mutual benefit of all the countries in the region and produce clean energy to the international community; another narrative on vital achievement of hydropower development as a symbol of national pride, honour, progress and prosperity to Tajik citizens. The following sections examine in detail how the dam is framed as a reflection of development, and as a source of clean and renewable energy that addresses climate change.

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY AND LEADERSHIP

International diplomacy was exercised to raise the issue of the Rogun Dam and of the country's unexploited hydroelectric potential at global forums of the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU). Furthermore, international conferences and seminars were hosted as well as incorporating global initiatives to raise awareness on water cooperation. This series of diplomatic strategies can help Tajikistan demonstrate leadership can be considered as the internationalisation of the dam issue to help legitimise the project and thus normalise the need for more energy in Tajikistan.

Starting in 2003, several events were organised in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, in which the Tajik view on water management issues and on regional cooperation was presented to the participants (see Table 1). These events – often organised under the auspices or with the financial support of the UN – serve to set the agenda on large-scale dams as an economically sound endeavour and as a necessary step in

[5] Due to the country's lack of energy, Tajikistan's population has electricity for two-three hours a day from October to May (Trend News Agency, 2012). Moreover, about 40% of the electricity produced in Tajikistan is used to power TalCo, the large state-owned aluminium company located close to the border with Uzbekistan (The World Bank, 2013).

Tajikistan's development path.[6] In 2015, for instance, while opening the High-Level International Conference on the implementation of the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life', Rahmon emphasised the need for Tajikistan to develop its "enormous hydropower potential", noting that "each year up to six months during the winter season population of the country faces severe power shortages (…) and this situation is absolutely unacceptable in the conditions of the beginning of XXI century" (Rahmon, 2015). It can be argued that this is an attempt at a sanctioned discourse (see Zeitoun and Warner, 2006) where no other alternative is possible but this source of energy. These events also had the intention to strengthen the image of the country as a world leader in promoting cooperation in the field of water, to show an aptitude to cooperate with Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian countries, and to propagate through authoritative channels the Tajik views on water management.

The discourse of the Rogun Dam is explicitly linked with positive development outcomes for both the Tajik state and the region. For instance, in 2005 the then Tajik Foreign Minister, Talbak Nazarov, underlined how "water resources possessed by Tajikistan provide us with considerable potential advantages in terms of the Millennium Development Goals' implementation, since they represent a huge hydro potential that, unfortunately, is currently used by less than 5 percent" (Nazarov, 2005). The achievement of energy independence is presented as "a matter of vital importance (…) which will have impact on further social and economic development of the country" (Zarifi, 2011).

As LeMarquand pointed out (1977), the desire to pursue a good neighbour policy or to be a model of cooperative international behaviour may positively influence a country's willingness to cooperate with its riparian neighbours. For example, Hamrokhon Zarifi, the then Tajik Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasised that the Rogun Dam would enable regional benefits by generating electricity that exceeds the "real needs of the region three and more times", and that allows Tajikistan "to satisfy the growing demands of neighbouring countries for cheap and non-polluting electric power" (Zarifi, 2009: 4). In addition, based on the assumption that the intense politicisation of water hampers regional cooperation and instead promotes the political agendas of groups or individuals (Abrams, 2003), the Tajik government reiterated its effort in promoting regional dialogue, proposing the creation of an international hydropower consortium to construct the dam (Zarifi, 2012). Sirodjidin Aslov, the Tajik Permanent Representative to the UN, stressed how with "the completion of the construction of the Ragun [sic] hydropower station in Tajikistan alone will make it possible to supply with water extra 3 million hectares of land in the neighbouring Central Asian states, and ensure water supply in the years of droughts" (Aslov, 2007: 3).

Creating and maintaining the image of a responsible regional and world actor has been seen as crucial by elite decision-makers including the Tajik president and his ministers. By promoting this project at international fora, the Tajik discourse presents the project not merely as a bilateral issue with Uzbekistan, but one that the international community can also get behind, especially with the development benefits of Tajikistan and its regional importance. However, while, on the one hand, Tajikistan did emerge as the regional leader in the promotion of water cooperation, on the other, the effective impact of these efforts on the actual construction of the Rogun Dam remains marginal, as Tajikistan's hydroelectric plans did not receive any official endorsement from the UN or any major regional powers.

[6] The UN tends to encourage initiatives aimed at stimulating water cooperation (refer for instance to the UN 'International Decade for Action Water for Life 2005-2015' webpage (http://bit.ly/1sMYcNU). Tajikistan has been particularly proactive in this regard, and the country put forward a series of initiatives that placed it at the forefront in the promotion of water cooperation in the region.

Table 1. Main water conferences organised by the Tajik government in 2003-2015.

Year and Place	Conference
2003, Dushanbe	International Water Forum (also known as Dushanbe Fresh Water Forum)
2005, Dushanbe	International Conference on Regional Cooperation in Transboundary River Basins
2008, Dushanbe	International Conference on Water Related Disaster Reduction
2010, Dushanbe	High-level Conference on the Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the International Decade 'Water for Life: 2005-2015'
2011, Dushanbe	Towards the Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO+20): Water Cooperation Issues
2013, Dushanbe	High-level International Conference on Water Cooperation
2015, Dushanbe	High Level International Conference on the implementation of the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life', 2005-2015

LEADERSHIP UNDERPINNED BY FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Not long after the first series of conferences were organised, Wegerich (2008: 83) noted that Tajikistan "started to challenge the hegemony of Uzbekistan, which has so far dominated the international arena with its own sponsored favoured discourses, such as at ICID, the World Water Week in Stockholm, Green Cross International and the World Water Forum". However, undermining the sanctioned discourse cannot be done to immediate effect. The Rogun case study shows how leadership as a form of 'soft' power needs to be underpinned by financial resources. The intimate connection between water, money and power was highlighted by Erik Swyngedouw (2006: 63), who observed that "the vital power relationship through which access to and exclusion from access to water is organised is undoubtedly money and capital". Controversial projects deter potential investors but those supported through legitimate international fora would have better chances of gaining multilateral funding. To this end, the Tajik government has attempted to attract large individual donors and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Seeking support from Russia has been particularly instrumental in realising the project. The investment by RusAl in 2004 was backed by President Vladimir Putin (Interfax, 2004). Financial support was necessary to make the project credible to its neighbours and seeking their consent for construction, thus paving the way for compliance to a new waterscape of Central Asia.

However, following these developments, Islam Karimov began actively lobbying against the Rogun Dam project. The best example of the effects of such lobbying is demonstrated when, after his visit to Uzbekistan in 2009, the then President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, clarified that "Hydroelectric power stations in the Central Asian region must be built with consideration of the interests of all neighbouring states", adding that, "if there is no common accord of all parties, Russia will refrain from participation in such projects"[7] (BBC Monitoring, 2009b). Subsequently, the two countries signed an agreement in which Uzbekistan would solely supply its natural gas to Russia (BBC Monitoring, 2009c). Similarly, following his visit to Uzbekistan, representing the views of a downstream riparian in the Syr Darya, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, initially interested in investing in the Rogun Dam (Radio Free Europe, 2008), declared that "there ought to be no hydroelectric power plants in the region

[7] Interestingly, it is reported that in February 2009 Islam Karimov temporarily softened his opposition to the project when he suggested that Uzbekistan could even invest in the Rogun Dam after the results of an independent impact assessment (Eurasianet, 2009).

without results of the expertise obtained and studied" (Vremya Novostei, 2010), referring to Uzbek demands of having an independent examination of the project.

It appears that Uzbekistan managed to influence Russia and Kazakhstan to such an extent that they eventually decided to withdraw their support to Tajik hydroelectric plans. By rallying support and influencing negotiations, hydro-hegemonic control can be used to maintain the status quo (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006). For Tajikistan, compliance by Uzbekistan requires more than a demonstration of leadership and the buy-in from international financial institutions and neighbours. Offering to Uzbekistan a compliance-encouraging "carrot" (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006) such as a direct involvement in the project through economic incentives, could have stimulated cooperation between the two countries and unlocked the participation of other economic partners.

Leadership can indeed be underpinned by financial resources, but it can also be undermined by their deficiency, as this can weaken the capacity of a country to set the agenda in a regionally controversial matter. The Rogun Dam case points to how 'soft' power does not automatically make up for the lack of financial means. As of March 2016, and following a fundraising campaign that has now lasted longer than a decade, potential funders have yet to be persuaded to invest into the Rogun Dam: it remains a controversial project that regional and international actors are not yet inclined to fund.

LEGITIMISING LEADERSHIP THROUGH DOMESTIC POLITICS

As part of its efforts to change the image of the Rogun Dam as a generally controversial project, the Tajik government intensified its efforts at presenting the dam as a fundamental achievement in the country's development path, so as to legitimise the enterprise also within domestic politics. As it was illustrated by Warner (2008), hydro-hegemony and the consolidation of hydraulic control is a layered phenomenon, and basin riparians are involved in a struggle for regional hegemony as well as for control at the domestic level. Domestic and international politics are closely interrelated (Warner and Zawahri, 2012), and the acceptance of the dam at the internal level can have repercussions at the international one.

Constructing knowledge about the Rogun Dam as an initiative that meets essential needs for the citizens of Tajikistan is a key tactic relying on discursive means. Many citizens were left without electricity and heating in many areas of the country, including the capital Dushanbe during the 2007-2008 winter, due to an energy crisis caused by extremely low temperatures and a reduction of electricity imports from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (Eurasianet, 2008; Laldjebaev, 2010). After this incident, national TV, radio channels and websites as well as banners and posters, disseminated the message on benefits of the Rogun Dam. These discursive strategies had the effect of shaping the dam as a necessary and important national endeavour that all citizens could benefit from.

Moreover, targeting both Tajik citizens living within the country and those working abroad,[8] the Tajik government has carried out a significant effort to propagate a sense of patriotism through the construction of the Rogun Dam (Menga, 2015). This process has a performative relevance to the Rogun Dam, where an ideology bound to the dam could facilitate its physical construction, notably when the citizens are called to financially support the project. The yearly Presidential address to the people of Tajikistan in 2010, broadcasted on Tajik state TV and radio, provided a comprehensive synthesis of the internal rhetoric. The dam was defined as "a national idea" and as a "symbol of the accomplishment and prosperity of the present and future Tajikistan", with Emomali Rahmon calling on "the children of Tajikistan living abroad" (Rahmon, 2010). The Rogun Dam is thus presented as a unifying project, benefiting from remittances sent home by Tajik migrants – an amount not insignificant as it is estimated

[8] The total labour migration out of Tajikistan is estimated to account for more than 15% of its population of 8.2 million (Malyuchenko, 2015).

to account for half of the GDP (ILO, 2010). Citizens were actively encouraged to buy shares of the Open Joint Stock Company Rogun that launched an IPO on 6 January 2010 (Rasul-zade, 2010). One year later, some two million shares of Rogun had been sold, accruing USD170 million.[9]

This framing of the Rogun Dam as an endeavour that brings together citizens reflecting patriotism and national identity, is a means to normalise the need for constructing the dam by the Tajik decision-makers. In the Central Asian political setting, national symbols such as this dam can be used by authoritarian rulers to create a legitimation framework and to maintain power (Cummings, 2002). Strong domestic support can enable a government developing its regional leadership. In other words, projecting abroad the image of Tajikistan as a stable country where the government has the (seeming) support of the population contributes to its 'soft' power. Presenting the Tajik government as a reliable financial partner could therefore facilitate the mobilisation of resources from outside of the country that is needed to fully ensure compliance by other basin states.

Nevertheless, these efforts have neither changed the power relationships between the basin states nor definitively altered the outcomes of water allocation for Tajikistan: investment by foreign funds has remained limited and the resolution of the dam dispute with Uzbekistan is lacking. Furthermore, the IPO effectively became a mechanism to collect the savings of Tajik citizens (Eshchanov et al., 2011), and therefore it appears that rather than solely relying on the 'soft' power of attraction, the Tajik government resorted to the authoritative exercise of collecting revenue from its citizens to obtain only a partial amount of what was originally sought.

TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS OF THE ROGUN DAM

The Tajik government framed the Rogun Dam as a cooperative regional project, to influence the international community and to gain support for its construction, both diplomatically and financially. Considering that dams and river diversion projects have altered the water flow in the Aral Sea basin, there is an attempt to change the perception of large dams as a cause of environmental degradation. The discourse presented by the Tajik elite seeks support for Tajikistan as a regional leader of environmental responsibility and cooperation. This is sharply contrasted against the claims made by the head of state in Uzbekistan, who contests the dam on grounds of environmental calamities and water shortages.

As Zeitoun et al. (2011) pointed out, the framing of a project is continuously promoted and rejected in discursive processes. The Uzbek government has constantly questioned whether the project is sound and has sought recourse to international law. Quoting the 1991 *UN Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context*, the 1992 *UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes,* and the 1997 *UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses*, the Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov (2007) noted that "states shall cooperate on the basis of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual benefit and good faith". The implication is that the impact of any hydroelectric project should be assessed by a team of international experts. However, the Tajik government has argued that the seismicity of the area where the project is located is not strong enough to pose a threat either to Tajikistan or to its neighbours (Akilov, 2010; Zarifi, 2013). For instance, concerns about the seismicity of the area raised by a Moscow-based scientist (Papyrin, 2011) were labelled as "myths about Rogun's dangers", by a leading Tajik scientist (Ikrami, 2012). Similarly, an alarmist article on the Rogun Dam and its potential catastrophic impact published by the Uzbek newspaper Pravda Vostoka (2011) was immediately

[9] Later in 2011, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) criticised the IPO saying that it would have negative effects on the country's economy at the macro level, and demanded Tajikistan to stop it (IMF, 2010).

contested in the Tajik government-owned website Avesta, noting that the seismicity of the area is not strong enough to pose a threat to the Rogun Dam (Avesta, 2011).

The Uzbek government repeatedly requested assessments of the project to be done by an authoritative organisation. In 2010, responding to these requests the Government of Tajikistan contracted the World Bank to execute two studies to evaluate the viability of the Rogun Dam according to international standards in 2010.[10] In September 2014[11] the World Bank released the two long-awaited studies, which showed that while the implementation of the project is uncertain, the dam will not pose a threat to basin riparians in case of earthquakes or floods (The World Bank, 2014a). As a way to increase the legitimacy of the project, Tajik decision-makers have posited the involvement of the World Bank as necessary and vital. It should be pointed out that Uzbekistan contested the assessment outcomes, questioning the impartiality and transparency of the whole process (UzDaily, 2014).

The Rogun Dam is not explicitly used by Tajikistan as a mere tool to pressure downstream riparian states to pay for water releases, thus establishing a revised form of water control. While the project is certainly a strategic one for Tajikistan, the leadership and potential buy-in by other actors have proven to be key features of the discursive process to justify and legitimise it. After the World Bank report, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Lukashevich (RIA Novosti, 2014) expressed his country's support for the Rogun Dam. Even though Russian support might not be followed by any concrete actions (as it was eventually the case in the 2000s), the effect of the authority of the World Bank imprinted on the project assessment along with the revived Russian interest make the Rogun Dam a prominent issue.

The status quo of water allocation has not been changed and Tajikistan's efforts aimed at countering Uzbekistan's hydro-hegemony in the Amu Darya River Basin through the use of 'soft' power have failed for the time being, in spite of considerable efforts to this end. In line with what was argued by Zeitoun et al. (2011), Tajikistan, the non-hegemonic riparian, found itself with a limited range of options when it tried to shape the agenda and promote its ideas. The only effective result has been the favourable assessment of the Rogun Dam carried out by the World Bank, although the extent to which Tajikistan might actually have influenced this endeavour can be questioned. The success of deploying discursive mechanisms depends on other factors, such as financial capacity, as this case showed. This analysis thus expands on Zeitoun et al. (2011), as it provides further insights into the role of 'soft' power and the features that can determine hydro-hegemony. As Mirumachi (2015) argued, the pace of hydraulic development is influenced by the level of financial capacity or human resources available. In the case of Tajikistan, its lack of financial resources impeded a quick resolution over the Rogun Dam dispute and the securing of compliance by other basin states, particularly Uzbekistan.

CONCLUSION

The paper illustrated the limitations of Tajikistan's use of 'soft' power to change a disadvantageous status quo and to advance the construction of the Rogun Dam. The starting point of this paper was that basin states are not equally endowed in their resources and capacity to control water resources within a shared river basin (Allan, 2001; Zeitoun and Warner, 2006). As a qualitative study this paper examined

[10] The two studies consisted of a Techno-Economic Assessment Study (TEAS, contracted to a consortium led by Coyne & Bellier), and an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA, contracted to Poyry Energy Ltd. of Switzerland) (The World Bank, n.d.).

[11] It is worth pointing out that in August 2012 Tajikistan suspended works on the Rogun Dam to await the release of the World Bank's feasibility studies (Trend News Agency, 2012). However, the Tajik government has continued allocating funds and carrying out repair works in the tunnels of the Rogun Dam even when the World Bank's studies were underway (Asia Times, 2012).

the discursive resources that basin states can use to try shaping the political influence for control over shared waters.

Decision-makers in Tajikistan have employed various strategies to establish the country's role as an environmental champion via international diplomacy, the mobilisation of financial support through powerful allies, and the adoption of a domestic policy aimed at fostering a sense of national identity and patriotism through the Rogun Dam. 'Soft' power plays a role in transboundary water interactions through discourses that frame river basin development and its effects of attaining integrative buy-in to proposed measures. Furthermore, the paper provides empirical confirmation to the arguments made by Zeitoun et al. (2011), by demonstrating that certain forms of 'soft' power can be made more effective by the underpinning of 'hard' power. Leadership can be buttressed by financial resources, but it can also be weakened by their deficiency.

In the specific case of Tajikistan, changing the status quo of water allocation has yet to be achieved. This case study serves as an example of the drawn-out process of changes to hydro-hegemony where complex transboundary water interactions are manifested with power asymmetry. Future studies are necessary to follow up the effects of the World Bank assessments and on Tajikistan's final decision on the Rogun Dam, to observe Uzbekistan's reaction and to assess the effectiveness of Tajikistan counter-hegemonic actions. More broadly, further research can analyse challenges to the status quo through counter-hegemonic processes, and its implications in shifting the power balance in an international river basin.

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